1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

In the chapter on marriage we saw how the elders had to witness the betrothal ceremonies, and how the *panchayats* deal with cases of divorce and elopement. It may be added that among the Hill Marias the clan-headman, like the *Sendhia* of the Chanda Marias, gets certain traditional fees which the parties have to pay in addition to the compensation which the *panchayat* may award to the injured parents or husband, or to the cost of the tribal feast; at every marriage in Kutru and Bhairamgarh Mar the clan-headman gets a fee of eight annas; when a *panchayat* has settled the compensation to be given to the first husband by the man with whom his wife has eloped, the old and the new husband have each to pay the clan-headman four annas. But the latter is expected not to retain the whole of his fee-income, but to divide it with the headmen of the villages of his clan who have assisted in the ceremony or *panchayat*.

I have already described on page 246 above, the ordeal to which the Gume Hill Maria clan *panchayat* in 1929 subjected a Toinar youth accused of incest with a girl of his clan. How far the ordeal survives in the remotest parts of the State I cannot say; naturally instances of its use very seldom come to light. There is reason to believe that ordeals of this kind were a regular feature of the 'justice' administered by bygone Chiefs and zamindars of Bastar, rather than a product of aboriginal thought; compare the account of the settlement of the Kudmer-Jatalur land dispute at page 96 above. Ordinarily, however, the *panchayats* follow no regular procedure beyond hearing the parties and their friends as informally as possible and deciding the case then and there after free discussion among themselves.

Questions of property seldom arise among the Hill Marias, there being obviously so little scope for dispute when 95 per cent. of the cultivation is shifting cultivation of hillsides regarded as the property of the clan and not of the individual, and when the village site is shifted at least every six years. Sons after marriage live in a separate portion of the long-house of their father or uncle, if there is space for adding a portion for them, or else build a separate house as close as possible; when next the village is shifted there is ample space for all to live in separate houses under one long-house roof. Questions of inheritance of houses therefore arise only when, as among the Bison-horn Marias, villages have become permanent and are not shifted at regular intervals. Even here, however, there are few disputes. The little value set on houses is shown by the fact that it is generally the youngest son who lives on in the father's house after his death, as probably his elder brothers will have married long before him and built separate houses for themselves on marriage. There is among the Bison-horn Marias a vague right to demand

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

CHAPTER TWO

THE MURIA'S LIVELIHOOD

I. The Muria Village

BEFORE approaching the main subject of this book, it is necessary to see how the chelik and motiari live at home. In a sense, there is no such thing as a typical Muria village any more than there is a typical Muria house. But most of the villages conform to the Gond pattern: they are set among trees—the Muria seem fonder of shade than wind and do not often choose the hill-tops beloved of the Maria and Baiga—and each house is enclosed within a separate fence that also surrounds its garden. There is thus a sharp distinction between a Muria and a Hill Maria village: the latter, like the Baiga village, consists of a row of houses joined together and opening on to a common street. Traces of this survive among the Muria in the enclosures of some of their leading men; at Markabera, for example, the headman's house is like a little village, a long enclosure with a small street on to which face many dwelling-places and granaries. In Palli-Barkot, and other western villages also, groups of related families build their houses to open round a square.

But generally the houses are scattered about, sometimes widely scattered, to suit the lie of the land and the dimensions of the gardens, and a street connects them with each other. There is no sociological significance in the layout of the village; neither the headman's nor the priest's houses nor the ghotul are ever in a special or recognized position.

The houses, nearly always two or three in number round a small courtyard, are built of timber or bamboo plastered with mud and have thatched roofs. As we move east we find the verandahs getting deeper and deeper until in the east of Kondagaon the verandah of the main house is often deeper than the room inside. Where houses are built like this, there is no need for special menstruation huts, which are indeed only to be found in the west in the neighbourhood of the Abujhmar, where there is no room to seclude a woman on the small verandahs.

To visit a Muria village is to receive a general impression of tidiness and cleanness, careful industry that exploits to the full the gifts of Mother Earth, and a love of animals. The pigsties are substantial, often with a double roof; the cattle-sheds are sometimes raised on pillars; sitting hens are given comfortable nests raised well above the ground. The houses themselves are cosy and homely, crammed with every sort of basket, leaf-bundle and utensil. Fish-traps, drums, wooden clogs hang from the roof, and flutes and bows and arrows are stuck under the thatch. Inside, in an inner room, is kept the mysterious Pot of the Departed where the family's ancestors are tended and placated.

These houses are the work-rooms of the chelik and motiari; they are the homes only of the married. The life and interest of chelik and motiari centre in the ghotul. But life there is definitely regarded as a preparation and training for the home. Those who live well and work hard in the dormitories will be good husbands and wives, fathers and mothers later on.

Most of the Muria are undoubtedly very poor. I was one day discussing with W. V. Grigson, who had visited Mandla after several years in Bastar, whether the Bastar villagers were poorer than those in the Central Provinces. I suggested—and he agreed—that probably the Bastar villagers were actually poorer, but that their lives were so much richer that they seemed far more

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

She goes among the bushes and turns into a tigress. She comes roaring and kills and eats the boy.

Then she becomes a girl again and goes on her journey. She meets a man fetching wood. He speaks to her and she turns into a tigress again and kills him. At last she reaches a Saturday bazaar. The bazaar is finished but she sits down near the carts of the merchants. Four men see her beauty and desire her. She makes them all mad and they run away.

A little boy is going round the bazaar picking up scraps, bits of lac, cigarette ends, grain and other odds and ends. He sees the girl and tells his grandfather about her. That grandfather is a magician. 'Come, daughter, and marry my son.'

That night the chelik hear that a beautiful girl has come to the magician's house. 'Let's bring her to the ghotul.' They go to the house and bring her singing and dancing on the way. They make her sleep with one of the chelik. Presently she says, 'This is too crowded, let's go outside'. They go out and the boy spreads his mat while the girl goes to relieve herself outside the compound. She comes roaring, a tigress, and kills her lover, then returns as a girl to the magician's house. The chelik suspect what has happened and go again and bring her by force to the ghotul. Once again they make her sleep with a boy to discover if it was really she who was the killer. Once again she takes the boy outside and goes to relieve herself, but this time the boys are waiting armed with sticks and when she comes into the compound they fall upon her and kill her.

VII. Leaving the Ghotul

A girl automatically leaves the ghotul when she is married and must never enter it again. In many places she gives a feast to the ghotul members either on the first day of the marriage ceremony or a week or so afterwards. Sometimes it is her duty to massage every chelik for the last time before she finally goes to her husband's house. The bridegroom also may give a present of a basket of mahua oil-seed which is pounded and cleaned, after which the motiari massage the chelik with it, including their legs.

The only exception to the rule that bars a married girl and even a widow from entering the ghotul is when a girl is married very young. She is then permitted to sleep in the dormitory and join in all its activities up to the time of her first menstrual period. In the Jamkot ghotul, for example, Kariya was married to a little girl and she continued to attend. Here they said that so long as the girl had not been sent officially to her husband, whether she had passed the menarche or no, she might continue as a motiari, but I think that this is unusual.

Such child-marriages are comparatively rare. Where children are married, it is generally in villages where there have been scandals in the ghotul and the parents, instead of interfering with the ghotul routine, adopt this means of preventing pre-nuptial pregnancy. At Korenda I was told that 'in the old days, when there were neither roads nor motor-cars, the Muria were honest, truthful and virtuous'. A boy was not considered suitable for marriage 'until he had made two or three long trips with a load', say from Narayanpur to Kondagaon or Kondagaon to Jagdalpur. The girls were not considered ready 'until their breasts were fully grown and even beginning to slope downwards'. But now the situation has changed. *Abiha rāj kalau, larka larki malau*—'The kingdom of today is black, the boys and girls are like monkeys'.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942, 1947 A 432 Gond A 432
Muria

GHOTUL MEMBERSHIP AND RULES

883X
582

It is definitely considered a sign of degeneration that children should be married young.

Sometimes the girl is older than the boy and then until the boy is grown up he continues to live in the ghotul and his wife stays at home. The Gurti of Kapsi, for example, was married to an older girl when he was quite a little boy. 'I always slept in the ghotul', he said. 'I never spoke to my wife except to ask for food. She would try to flirt with me, but I used to feel shy and look away. One night when I slept alone in the house she came and slept by my side. She held me fast and forced me to go to her. After that I always went to sleep in the ghotul.' The Ranger of Moroskoro had a similar experience. His wife was mature when he was still a little boy. She used to say, 'I will look after him, I will hatch him like an egg, till he is grown up'. She did so and now, says the Ranger, 'we are very happy. She looked after me so well that at last we got a fine home of our own'.

883X
591

A chelik does not leave the ghotul immediately after marriage. He retains his membership for some months until he can afford to give a farewell feast. At Palari, when I was there, the three leaders were all married; so was the Diwan of Bhanpuri and the Manjhi of Berma. When I went to Pupgaon in 1940, I found the four leaders, though all married, still sleeping regularly in the ghotul. Sometimes, as we shall see, a man remains as a sort of senior member for many years. But normally a few months after his marriage, a chelik gives a farewell feast to his old friends and bids a formal farewell. When Bindo, after his marriage, resigned his position as head of the ghotul, he called the elders of the village, gave them liquor and parched rice and returned the ring they had given him. The headman said, 'Now you are a married man, come no more to the ghotul and mix no more in the dance and song of the children. Look after your own house and property. Eat and live and have many children of your own'.

VIII. Married Men in the Ghotul

883X
837
684

Once the chelik or motiari have left the ghotul, there is a rather strict rule against their returning. As we have seen, this rule is absolute in the case of wives and widows and, indeed, no husband would permit his wife to revisit the scene of her youthful loves. There are a few cases where married girls have slipped into the ghotul at night. There was one at Chimri who visited her lover there, and he was heavily fined. I saw a married girl going to the ghotul at Nayanar and another at Markabera, but at Markabera the girl was seduced by two chelik and there was a great scandal. Such incidents are rare and meet with emphatic social disapproval.

883X
837

In the case of men, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between those who are invited and who are, in fact, given definite appointments, and those who come in casually. The latter are far from popular. Their presence leads to complications. Their wives quarrel with the girls and complain to the parents. They are a check on the gaiety of the youngsters. They demand motiari for themselves. Yet married men are often very anxious to come, and make any excuse to spend an evening or even to sleep in the ghotul. When the wife is in her period, for example, her husband may urge that it is necessary for him to sleep far removed from the danger of her contagion, and this excuse is generally accepted.

883X
626

But otherwise if a man persists in coming to the ghotul when he is not invited, the boys go to his house and steal first a cock, then a pig and at last even a goat. An effective method of putting such an unwanted visitor to shame is for a party of boys to escort him home singing and beating their drums.

THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

X 883 626 When they reach his house they call for his wife and sent them up together in a room just as they did once before at their marriage. To make it more realistic, they steal a cock and scatter its feathers along the road. This suggests that the couple were not properly married before. Very few people are sufficiently hardened to persist in their visits after this.

X 883 837 But when a man who is popular among the younger people and trusted by them is invited to the ghotul, or is allowed to retain his appointment, things are very different. Such a man may even be allowed to sleep with a motiari occasionally, or one of his friends will slip out at night and give him place. It is remarkable that in many cases married men continue to act for years as leaders of the ghotul. Such a man is the very popular Lakmu, who is still at the age of forty the Diwan of Masora. His own son, Phirtu, is the Chowkidar of the same ghotul. The Diwan of Kabonga was married five years ago and attends the ghotul when visitors come or a judgement has to be given. 'Whenever I sleep there', he said, 'the boys give me a motiari to keep me company.' He also goes out with the boys on their dancing expeditions. At Hathipakna, Maru, the Sirdar of the ghotul, married again after the death of his first wife. He is still continuing his duties after his marriage. Ghasi, the Diwan of this ghotul, has been married for ten years; Gaglu, the Mukhwan, has been married for eight; they continue to hold office, though they only rarely sleep in the dormitory.

Indeed a popular boy, especially a Kotwar, sometimes has great difficulty in leaving the ghotul. At Margaon the Kotwar said, 'They refused to let me go, and my wife used to quarrel with me every night. At last I gave a bottle of liquor to the chelik and motiari, and begged them to free me from my duties. They did so and since then there have been no more quarrels in my home.' In 1947 at Kabonga there were no fewer than three Kotwars, none of whom was allowed to leave. At last the eldest found it very difficult to continue coming to the ghotul and told the chelik so at the Mahua Dandar. He was fined four annas and then excused.

X 883 ● 591 768 589 There are other reasons besides popularity for this. Sometimes big boys are married to very little girls and the boys naturally remain in the ghotul until their wives are mature. Sometimes widowers return to their ghotul and decide not to marry again. The leader of the Markabera ghotul, Dasru, is a widower. After his wife's death he returned to the ghotul and resumed his duties. In Padbera a widower with his little son both come regularly. Then again there are men who never marry. It is not unusual to see men of thirty or forty years still unmarried, still wearing all the ornaments of the chelik and continuing as ordinary members of the ghotul. Kodiya, for example, the Diwan of Malakot, now about 45 years old, is still unmarried. Here the working head of the dormitory is the Sirdar, a charming youth, who uses his Diwan as a sort of appellate court in cases of difficulty and dispute.

X 883 The association of older men with the ghotul is far from harmful. They are able to supervise the life of the children, to prevent bullying and unkindness, to look after their health, to hush up scandals and to settle serious disputes.

X 883 578 But it is never approved by their wives. The attitude of the wife of the Malik of Chikdongri is typical. 'You are always going to the ghotul', she said. 'well why not get some nice boy to sleep with me. You provide amusement for yourself, why not for me?' The Baidar of Kameri said, 'After I was married, I couldn't stop going to the ghotul. The elders complained, and my father got me a second wife thinking that would keep me at home. At last the village panchayat fined me three rupees, and I stopped going.'

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE GHOTUL AND MARRIAGE

581
539

O that beautiful ghotul!
Every day you went to clean it.
The road was like a jackal's tail.
You used to go along that road.
In your left hand was a winnowing-fan,
In your right hand a broom,
At sunset you would go there.
You will never see that Raj again.
Now you are going to your husband's house.
Now your pleasure will be work in the house.
You have got no sense at all.
Your husband will curse you,
Your mother-in-law will curse you.
Holding your forehead you will weep.
You will remember the days of youth.
Then you will know what hardship is.
You have got no sense at all.

883X
593
[591]

The first days of marriage certainly appear to emphasize this taunt. The new life together is not immediately satisfactory, especially for the girl. She has to stay in a house filled with her husband's relatives, and work for them. She has not yet a house, perhaps not even a room, of her own. It is not easy for her to adjust herself to the complete and drastic change in her life. 'A young wife,' they said at Masora, 'is like a bulbul whose tail goes up and down all the time. So does she shake her buttocks. She cooks if she feels like it, gets water if she feels inclined. It is hard for her to forget she is no more a motiari; her feet itch to dance.' But she must never enter the ghotul again, the ghotul which for the last six or eight years has been the centre of her social and emotional life. She must avoid her old ghotul partners; she must forget her ghotul name; she must give away most of her ornaments; she has lost her freedom. Lingo Pen will no longer protect her from pregnancy, which indeed quickly follows. There are no more rapturous evenings round the ghotul fire, no more expeditions through the green forest to other villages, no more dancing to the light of torches at the great festivals. She is now a wife and must prepare to be a mother.

For the husband the change is less drastic. He may continue to spend his evenings in the ghotul, returning home late at night to sleep. This is perhaps the hardest trial that the young wife has to bear; she must abandon old romance, he may continue it. He even holds his ghotul title for six months or a year longer. He may go on expeditions, organise marriages, dance at festivals. But his sex life is undoubtedly curtailed. 'Now he is responsible,' I was told at Malakot. 'He is a man with wife and home. Fun and teasing is ended, touching others is ended; he has a wife. For his old habits the penalty is swelling and death. He may now only do it at marriages and at the sport of the gods at festivals.' Even his visits to the ghotul must soon end. Sooner or later he must lay down his office; sooner or later comes the day when the boys suggest that his presence is no longer so welcome as it was. He must then stop his visits or he will be fined and his poultry stolen.

But by this time married life has become established and serene. Happiness has begun to illuminate the hard tasks of home and field. That is why the Muria regard marriage of such supreme importance; everyone must pass through its gate to the fulfilment of tribal and social life. The ghotul with its many joys might easily have become an end in itself. But the Muria

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

Man and wife generally settle down at first in a small hut of their own. But there is a sort of joint family system with the father or elder brother as the patriarchal head, and sometimes a large family occupies an entire hamlet of its own in one part of the village territory. The institution of the cross-cousin marriage tends to unite families very closely. 591 621

This happy and united family life is disturbed by several causes. One, as we have seen, is the commonplace invasion of the happiness of two people by a third. Another is the presence of the husband's younger brother in the house, and the privileged relationship which he has with the elder brother's wife. Another is the custom that allows a married girl to visit her mother's house. Yet another is man's insatiable passion for domestic experiment which leads to the complicated and dubious joys of plural marriage. 578 593

It will be of interest to compare with this the situation in ordinary Hindu families, where the common disparity of age between husband and wife creates stresses from which the Maria are free. 'There are tendencies at work within the family institution itself which sometimes lead to criminal action. The joint family rests upon the mutual toleration and sacrifice of the different members of the household. While forbearance is the outcome of long discipline in joint family life, it is put to a severe test as a result of the growth of individualism. Again, the disparity between the ages of husband and wife, of parents-in-law and girl-wife, offers opportunities of exploitation and even cruelty. The custom of infant marriage is apt to promote oppression, especially where there is a striking difference in age between the husband and the wife. Cases of cruelty to young wives are often brought to the courts in India. 171

'In 1929 a Hindu weaver in Hyderabad, who had married a young girl, chained her like an animal to a big mill-stone to prevent her making frequent attempts to run away. She subsequently died.

'In another case in the same year a young girl-wife who was being forcibly taken to her husband's house managed to free herself, jumped into a wayside well, and was drowned'.[1]

[1] Haikerwal, op. cit., p. 35.